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RECEIVED DEPARTMENT OF STATE JUN 13 10 01 AM 1967 RSB ANALYSIS BRANCH

COPY NO. 1 SERIES A

TO : DEPARTMENT OF STATE

INFO: BANGKOK, CINCPAC, DA NANG, VIENTIANE

FROM : Amembassy SAIGON DATE: June 10, 1967

SUBJECT : Organizational Activity of Major Presidential Candidates

REF : A. State 205159 B. Saigon 26352 C. Saigon 19123
D. Saigon 26245 E. Saigon A-638 F. Saigon 22871
G. Saigon 26058 H. Saigon 26777

EXCISE

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1. The referenced messages contain most of the information available to the Mission on the subject of the organizational activity of the major civilian candidates, their platforms, and their supporters. We agree that the organizational development of most of the candidates seems to be going forward rather slowly considering that the election is now less than three months away. One reason for this apparent slowness is that the candidates, in best Vietnamese style, are placing their hopes primarily on personal alliances. They are now heavily engaged in trying to build a net of personal relationships with the leaders of major factions and are not in general trying to create new, US style campaign organizations. Their program in most cases is a matter of collecting existing groups, counting on those groups to support them more or less independently of one another. They expect those leaders and factions whose support they win to use the methods and the means already available to them. Thus we anticipate that organizational innovations will be few in number in the coming campaign. There is also little prospect of the emergence during this period of anything like national political parties. The following is a summary of our previous reporting on such activities by the major civilian contenders; we have added what additional information we have been able to develop since the receipt of REF A. We will be reporting on the organizational activities of Thieu and Ky in a separate message.

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Drafted by: POL:TJCHeavner/JDNegroponte:eac 6-10-67 | Contents and Classification Approved by: POL:JACalhoun

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY [illegible] DATE 12/7/11
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2. Tran Van Huong.

a. Huong appears to be leaving the work of organizing his campaign primarily to a small circle of southern leaders which includes the Chef de Cabinet of the Department of Defense, Huynh Van Dao, former Youth Minister Vo Long Trieu, former Education Minister Nguyen Van Truong, and former Economic Minister Au Truong Thanh. Huong told an Emboff May 21 that if this group has a chairman it will be Dao.

b. Unlike the other civilian candidates, Huong's supporters are making some efforts to set up a formal campaign machine, though their major reliance is also on existing groups and personal ties. On May 31 Trieu told an Emboff that Huong has campaign representatives in 30 provinces, but in no case does the organization extend to the district level. Trieu said that the organization is particularly weak in the Center, though there are Huong representatives in Hue, Da Nang, and Nha Trang.

c. Of the members of Huong's central "campaign committee," the most active appear to be Trieu and Truong. Trieu took a leading role in the formation of the Renaissance of the South (MRS) party. He continues to maintain close contact with that group, particularly its seven Assembly deputies. While we are not aware of any concrete plans for utilization of the MRS in the campaign, it is safe to assume that MRS members have discussed campaign plans with Trieu and that the MRS will take an active role in Huong's drive for the Presidency.

d. Trieu is also well connected in Catholic circles. Emboffs have observed that he seems to be on good terms with Archbishop Nguyen van Binh, and that Binh is at least very interested in Huong's candidacy. [b-1 ed
]he believes the Catholic vote will be determined by the parish priests and the clerical hierarchy. He claims that "many" priests favor Huong and that the Catholic "Greater Solidarity Force" (GSF) will not back Ky. (Our present information indicates that the GSF, while not formally committed, will probably opt for Ky and may become part of a political front which Ky wants to establish in support of his candidacy. At the moment, the Catholic rank and file appears to be divided between Huong and Ky, with no clear preference emerging. There may be some Catholic sentiment for Thieu, but this has not emerged, perhaps because of the uncertainty surrounding his intentions. If he were to back Huong, Thieu might be able to increase Huong's Catholic backing somewhat.) Probably Trieu and his friends have made some efforts to line up influential priests and leaders within the Catholic hierarchy. We doubt however that any of these are involved in a formal Huong campaign machine or even that many are now firmly committed to Huong.

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e. Truong is now the chairman of the "old school boys association" (lien truong), an influential alumni organization of five leading southern high schools. While this group is not likely to back any candidate in a formal or cohesive way, Truong can probably drum up some intellectual and civil servant support from this connection.

f. In conversations with journalists, Huong has stressed the support of his former pupils, and these links may be a factor in his campaign. What Dao can do for the ticket through his links with the military and the civil bureaucracy is unclear. The role of Au Truong Thanh is also uncertain at this time. Huong and his supporters have referred to Thanh as an advisor, and Emboffs have noted that he is in regular contact with Trieu. How much support Thanh can bring to the ticket and how this might be organized has not emerged.

g. If, as now seems likely, Mai Tho Truyen turns out to be Huong's Vice Presidential running mate, he will probably bring to Huong's assistance his Southern Buddhist Studies Association. This group, according to Truyen, is a loose Buddhist lay organization having about 2,000 members. Its influence is not believed to be very substantial. However, as a widely respected Buddhist layman who is acceptable to both the Tri Quang and the Tam Chau factions, Truyen can probably do something to offset Huong's reputation as an enemy of the Buddhists. Tri Quang is reported to be leaning toward Huong, probably because he sees in Huong the best hope for defeating Ky. Recent comments to an Emboff by both Huong indicate that there will be no formal links between the militant Buddhists and Huong, however. Given his stated antipathy for the Tri Quang faction, it is not impossible that Huong would even publicly reject Tri Quang's backing. It is more likely, however, that Huong will tacitly accept Tri Quang's support if it is offered.

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h. Huong's platform is apparently not yet well defined, but comments by Huong and his supporters suggest that he intends to base much of his campaign on the issue of corruption. Both Huong and his likely running mate, Mai Tho Truyen, are widely known as men with no selfish interests. In recent conversations both have stressed the deterioration of the moral fiber of Vietnamese society, the prevalence of corruption, and the need for sweeping reforms. Huong's comments (REF B.) suggest that he may combine this issue with criticism of the methods and shortcomings of American aid. Huong may also intend to use the "peace" issue in his campaign. While he seemed to be saying as much in a recent conversation

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with an pursued this subject in some detail in a separate conversation. Huong has told American journalists that he does not plan to raise this issue because it is too risky. With Au Truong Thanh as his advisor, it is also likely that Huong will use the issue of inflation and related economic problems. b-1 ed

3. Phan Khac Suu.

a. On several occasions in recent weeks Emboffs have asked Suu what he is doing to prepare for the coming campaign. Suu's response is that the campaign does not begin until August, the inference being that it would be improper to begin organizational activity at this time. quotes Suu as saying that he will not organize a party in support of his candidacy because a party would create opposition whereas Suu now has "the general backing of the nation." Our impression is that Suu in fact has done virtually no organizing, even in terms of lining up his personal connections with various leaders and factions. He seems to believe that his prestige is so great that he does not need an organization, and as a matter of fact there is no doubt that Suu is a proven vote getter as is his running mate. b-1 ec

b. Suu claims backing from the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao, but all indications are that he will in fact get little support from the leadership of those groups. Within the Assembly, indicate that he is having difficulty in lining up 30 deputies to "introduce" him in keeping with that provision of the electoral law. (Such support may now not be necessary, since the Directorate has apparently decided to promulgate the election law without the provision requiring 30 "introductions" of candidates.) b-1 ec

c. Suu is interested in economic problems and socialist reforms. In private conversations, he has sometimes shown considerable interest in economic reforms, particularly land reform. According to he favors a sweeping socialism that would level incomes and virtually eliminate private business and industry. How much such a program will figure in his campaign platform remains to be seen. If he runs true to form, he may confine his campaign oratory largely to generalities about democracy and social justice.

4. Ha Thuc Ky.

a. Revolutionary Dai Viets close to Ha Thuc Ky tell us that his campaign organization will consist primarily of party members plus

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university student sympathizers from the Universities of Hue, Dalat, Saigon and Can Tho. Dai Viet member and Assembly deputy told an Emboff that Ha Thuc Ky has "representatives" in most provinces. We have also noted an effective increase in Dai Viet efforts to increase party membership, including within the armed forces. Party leaders have been saying for some time that if they are satisfied with the party law to be passed by the Assembly, the party will surface and campaign openly for Ha Thuc Ky. Assembly leader Nguyen Van Ngai said recently that he believes Ky can get 1.6 million votes.

b. Ky's organizational base is strongest in northern I Corps where Revolutionary Dai Viet party cadres occupy a number of key military and administrative positions. Elsewhere in South Viet-Nam, Ky, despite recent attempts to expand his organization, will rely primarily on personal alliances rather than his own party. He counts on support from Nguyen Long Chau's "four Muses" Buddhist sect and from Cao Dai in the lower Delta. (Neither of these are likely to swing many votes.) Ky has also told us several times he hopes for considerable Catholic backing. On June 3 he told an Emboff that he had already received a private pledge of support from Father Nguyen Van Thuan, formerly Chancellor of Hue Archdiocese and recently appointed Bishop of Nha Trang. Ky is hopeful of more quiet support from the Catholic hierarchy after the Bishops' conference scheduled for later this month. We are skeptical of Ky's chances of getting significant Catholic backing, however.

c. As a political party leader, Ky is very likely to stress the desirability of evolution towards an effective two-party system and the need for civilian rule. Dai Viet Assembly leader Nguyen Van Ngai has expressed strong opposition to military government, and he appears to regard this as a general feeling among the population. Corruption and misapplication of U.S. aid could well figure heavily in Ky's campaign propaganda. However, he is also likely to be as outspoken as any civilian candidate in his support of the U.S. military presence in South Viet-Nam as necessary in assuring the nation's survival.

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KATHMANDU FOR ABASSADOR BUNKER

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

REF: SAIGON 27812

SUBJECT: THIEU - KY

1. POLITICAL COUNSELOR HAD A FURTHER TALK JUNE 11 WITH [redacted] BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE FOR [redacted]

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2. [redacted] SAID SITUATION HAD NOT CHANGED FUNDAMENTALLY SINCE HIS CONVERSATION WITH US JUNE 8. THE ONLY TALK SINCE THEN BETWEEN THIEU AND KY HAD BEEN WITH OTHER GENERALS PRESENT AND HAD THEREFORE NOT TOUCHED ON THE MAIN ISSUE. [redacted] SAID HE HAD HAD A FURTHER TALK WITH [redacted] (WHO IS ALSO LEAVING FOR HIS POST) [redacted] THOUGHT AS A RESULT OF THIS TALK THAT THIEU MIGHT MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS CANDIDACY AROUND JUNE 15 BUT HE AND [redacted] DID NOT FEEL THAT THIS WOULD PRECLUDE A SATISFACTORY ARRANGEMENT BETWEEN THIEU AND KY. HE AGREED HOWEVER THAT THIS WOULD PERHAPS MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR THIEU TO WITHDRAW AND ACCEPT SOME OTHER POSITION.

3. [redacted] REITERATED HIS CONVICTION THAT THE SITUATION REMAINED UNDER CONTROL AND THAT NO OUTWARD STEPS WOULD BE TAKEN BY THE TWO PRINCIPALS OR THOSE IMMEDIATELY AROUND THEM. [redacted] SAID THAT ONE OF THE REASONS KY HAD NOT DONE ANYTHING FURTHER WAS THAT HE WAS SPENDING MUCH OF HIS TIME ON THE QUESTION OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE DIRECTORATE AND THE ASSEMBLY ON THE ELECTORAL LAWS WHICH HE WAS DETERMINED TO LET GET OUT OF HAND.

4. [redacted] SAID HE EXPECTED TO RETURN HERE ABOUT THE END OF JUNE BUT REITERATED THAT IF NECESSARY HE COULD COME BACK SOONER.
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